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Episode Title: From Georgia to Great Britain and back

Interviewee: Tamara Vepkhvadze

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Holly Taylor-Zuntz 00:00

Welcome to Voices of the Ancestors, where we explore Georgian polyphonic songs

Susan Thompson

and the women who sing them.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Hello and welcome to Voices of the Ancestors with me, Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Susan Thompson

And me Susan Thompson

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

And today I am speaking to you from my quarantine hotel in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Susan Thompson

It's so exciting Holly – I never thought I'd hear you say that, it's just brilliant. But I'm not in your quarantine hotel, I'm in our lovely new apartment here in Tbilisi, but one of the downsides of a new apartment is sometimes you have unexpected noises, so I think our new neighbours might have been drilling to put up a shelf or something like that when we were doing this recording.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 0:57

Yeah, I mean you just got a laugh haven't you - I mean we find the one time when we're all free to record and then this drill decides to add its voice to our vibrations. But don't worry it does go away after about 10-minutes just in time for our guests to tell a lovely story about Katie Melua. Our guest today is Tamara Vepkhvadze and we wanted to interview her because we were so intrigued by her story. She's a Georgian woman, but it wasn't until she was in London that she started singing Georgian songs, as she would say 'in voices' or 'in harmony' and there was a real spontaneous energy to our interview so we wanted to reflect that in the music that we've used in the episode. So I think much all of the music you'r going to hear um, comes from live recordings whether that's Tamara and her son Giorgi during the recording or ensemble Tabuni in a live performance something from the Summer Song Festival with Katie Melua.

Susan Thompson 2:00

So, if you're somebody that really likes to know all the details of something before you listen to a story it would be a really good idea to listen to episodes six and seven before this one because Tamara does reference various characters in her story telling that you may not have come across. Um but if your happy to just go with the flow then sit back and enjoy the episode.

Music Makharia by Ialoni

Susan Thompson 2:31

Well Hello, today I'm here with a drill.... I don't know if you can hear it in the background, it's just started. But more importantly our guest today is Tamara and I'm going to ask her to say her surname because I think I might trip over it, because I would say it like, Vepkhvadze, but I think

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Vepkhvadze

Susan Thompson

Yeah, you see, I'm not going to get to that one.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 2:55

Do you know the meaning?

Susan Thompson

No...

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Vepkhvi means tiger.

Susan Thompson & Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Ah Yes. Oh Yes

Susan Thompson

Ah I shall think of you as a tiger now - that's so lovely.

So I know Tamara from London, because she lived in the UK - I don't know how long for?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

I think it's already 16 Years it will be, or 15?

Susan Thompson

15 Years Wow. And in London ooh Tamara came and sang sometimes with [Maspindzeli](#) the London Georgian choir and I know you sang sometimes with the Church choir in London. [The](#)

[Orthodox Georgian Church](#) Choir um and I also know that you run, or ran or actually run, because you are still doing it from Georgia which is extraordinary - an Art Studio. What's the name of it?

Tamara Vepkhvadze 3:41

It's [Gonieri Art Studio](#).

Susan Thompson

Gonieri, that's so lovely, and that's for children or adults?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

It's mostly for children and young people but we've done some adult projects and I have lots of adult projects in my head - intergenerational.

Susan Thompson

So nice and you also have a son and I've had the pleasure of singing with your son (Tamara: I know) at the Summer Song Festival. Um that was in London and that's where [Katie Melua](#) was as well wasn't it.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes

Susan Thompson

That was so exciting.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Actually I was listening today to get the mood,

Susan Thompson

Yeah

Tamara Vepkhvadze

How wonderful it was

Susan Thompson

It was extraordinary. And I'm not sure how old Giorgi was then?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

So that was 2018, so he must be 7.

Susan Thompson

Yeah he was quite a little lad. Um and now he's with you here in Georgia and he's singing with [Amer Imeri](#).

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yeah - yes I take it as a dream come true. (laughter) Yeah we will talk about it later.

Susan Thompson

We will.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

How that dream came true Yes.

Susan Thompson

And I hope our listeners will get the chance to meet Giorgi a little later on as well.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes. He'll be joining us.

Susan Thompson

He will.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 5:00

Maybe Tamara you could introduce yourself and tell us how you came to start singing Georgian songs.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes. So it's quite a journey - um I like to call it a journey, um a fascinating journey. Um and I would say it started somewhere around 2009.

It was the autumn er and it was invited in one Georgian event. In um [the First Georgian Supplementary School](#) in the United Kingdom run by the amazing [Liana Jikia-Gogritchiani](#) And they were holding um, autumn Harvest, 'rtveli' you know there were children making churkheldas there, singing and dancing. So on that day I was invited because that time I was newly graduated from University of Queen Mary in London. And I didn't know a lot of Georgians in London, really, so. I was really happy to be in a Georgian environment and all this - it looked amazing. And then there was this Georgian man choir there, I didn't know anybody and they were singing and the leader was, beautiful girl, yeah, and it was Tamta. Tamta Turmanidze who is my beloved friend, right now. And er yes she was leading the choir and on a break time I just talked to her because er, Georgian polyphony always amazed me but I never had chance to sing in, in voices. I always was solo and um, I asked Tamta, "Tamta do you teach polyphonic singing, Georgian Polyphonic singing?" And she was Yes. And I said "Can you teach me how to sing in voices?" And Tamta looked at me and with her beautiful eyes, smiled and said are you a serious person? And it was a funny beginning. Er so that's how it started, so, apparently I was a serious person and very soon I was invited to a Christmas dinner of 'Tabuni'. Now [Tabuni](#) is/was, well it still is, we are just on a break, I hope. It's a women's choir in London. By that time it was 8 women, and it was led by Tamta and those women, wonderful women, they were English, mostly. So I was - they didn't have any Georgian members really. So I joined them and when I saw them singing beautifully I was a bit, I need to admit, scared. I thought I can't join this

choir, they are too good for me. But you know Tamta was very encouraging and they gave me some, you know they sang with me, they probably was er thinking does it fit or not? Whatever happened, I joined the choir and yes then my journey started there. We performed, a few places, it was a wonderful experience around the London, in many churches, quite big audiences. Um and yes that was my first touch to that and then um that folks songs and this experience with polyphony brought me to the church. I used to go to church just for listen for the service, Sunday services but then I went, er. the Church Choir needed some members and I was, I was asked if I, or I asked ,I don't remember but yeah, I joined Georgian Church Choir and that was another big step in my life because I was introduced to this church music, which was different, I must say but it was I was totally enchanted in a good way and I was totally absorbed with this music.

9:25 Music - [Sakhioba](#) : [kriste agdga](#)

Tamara Vepkhvadze 10:12

And er, slowly, slowly I started learning chants and then one day. I call it a miracle, that we had a new choir leader - [Malchaz Erkvanidze](#). (Tamara laughs) That was truly blessing. Um probably many people who listens this podcast will know him. I called him a 'modern knight', like a knight, a fighter of um chants, Georgian chants.

Susan Thompson

Aaah

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And er, yeah, Malchaz was a remote leader, but he was coming few times a year to rehearse with Georgian church choir and that time, those years were beautiful, because we not only rehearse, you know the chants, the church music, but we could, we would, we would sing lots of folk songs and you know how big is Malchaz expertise in that field - so he she would teach us such a beautiful songs and this togetherness and we would sing hours and hours. My husband was like - when are you gonna come back home? So we would use every minute Malchaz was in London. And was supra's of course - yes with lots of singing and food and drink, drink Georgian wine. Um, that was really good memories. Um and it still is we are um still. Malchaz became my teacher, my second teacher um - how wonderful is that. Yes.

Susan Thompson

And you've learnt songs with Malchaz in Georgia? In the his, his part of the world, in Guria?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes, that was already later on. (Susan: Aaah) When I just joined his [tour](#) in er -it was wonderful we travelled around the world and were singing during two weeks - oh that was the best time of my dunno life - I can say one of my best times with the some Cambridge choir members er Johny, Kate and Susan

12:25 Music - Tabuni : Gonja

Tamara Vepkhvadze 13:09

Here I want to mention how I came to all this together came and How did I - how the studio happened.

Susan Thompson

Ah yes

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Cause - it's all connected, as we know Susan, right. So it's all connected because, er I was teaching Georgian language in a Sunday school and of course I brought some songs to teach the children to learn and I was teaching them and, once I have even a picture, there were three children in the picture and I'm teaching them a song. And when I look at the picture, they were all our children. I mean the choir members, children of choir members, church choir members, and I was like wow that can be our future. That's, they can be future singers of, or chanters, and I think that's a spark, but I believe in those moments in life when when it defines your path right. Like yes let's, let's think something about it and um since that moment I must say I did not stop thinking about it. (*Laughter*) By that time I had already had established my own Social Enterprise and which is Gonieri CIC it's a community interest company we help Communities with er, creative learning projects, with intergenerational bilingual resources and er of course Georgian community always was in my head but then it all came together and I just started looking for a place, where we could do all this and again with the help of some Georgian parents we found some, a little studio, Community Centre, I must say - very close to the church. um and we hired that studio and timing was very important and the children. OK I said ok the children after Church Service they can come to, and the Sunday School, they can come to the Art Studio and continue their Georgian experience. So basically all Sunday children would be in a Georgian environments so that sounded really good for me and for parents and they know, they knew me, the children knew me, so that everything was already settled. It just needed a big er spark. And one day it was 2017 I think 2017 18th October, we had an opening day. I invited parents, children that's, I showed them that's what we are going to do and here I need to mention Nino which is my, basically we are doing this together, me and [Nino Bazarashvili](#). She er she's amazing singer by the way, she's beautiful singer of Georgian City songs and she was grown up singing in families and she had all this dreams also what I had. We just said together and, and of course she believed in me, not of course but she believed in me, because she trusted me, and then we started together. She gave her time and energy and here we go - it was very it was quite a success. Um so Nino teaches violin and piano lessons then after Piano and Violin lessons they come to singing, folk music singing class and after that there was a Georgian theatre class and after that Georgia dance class.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 17:04

Oh my goodness, it sounds like heaven - can I join?

Tamara Vepkhvadze 17:07

Why not. We would finish at 7 O'clock in the evening, and nobody wanted to go home. Parents (laughs) it was community spirit. So I know a lot about Communities that time already because I ran puppet, puppet project you see in my local community, in Hackney. I'm a self taught puppeteer. Well I did some, you know courses also in the [Little Angel Theatre](#). I work with them as a volunteer very often. It's a beautiful, beautiful theatre in North London. We've seen all the performances for I dunno the last 5 Yrs. They've done - they run lots of community teaching courses and I'm taking all of them so at the time I had this community spirit. I know what makes it work and it all worked out. Yes and um and we did many projects like um, we did combined concerts with er Georgian dance group [Pesvebi](#) as you remember and [Maspindzeli](#) of course always was there to support us and I can't say my grati.. How grateful I feel about Bernard about you Susan, about people coming from different places in England to London just perform with us. It wouldn't happen without you I must say. Because of course I, er voice, singing voices with children, it's not an easy thing, and the youngest one was 4, 5 years old so it was very ambitious project, to be honest, some people were skeptic - voices at such a young age, young children. But I am so proud of these children who started there, at that time but now they are 9/10 I mean well, the one was 4 maybe I mean it's been 4 years, So now they - the polyphony for them is a very very familiar thing. I have children who can find bass themselves in this, er, you know this drone bass, this ostinato bass is not a problem for them at all.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 19:36

Oh that's great. And who are the children that come to you Tamara? Are they er.. Do they have Georgian parents or do they have British parents?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Mostly they are Georgian, or mixed families. So one parent is Georgian and one from another ethnic group or another nation like my son. (laughter) Because my son was the biggest inspiration to be honest. Of course altogether, my son was the biggest inspiration because he was, I don't think he was singing before Studio. He was listening to how I was singing but I never tried to - I don't know, and probably yes, that was the time my son first started singing And thanks God, he has this very powerful voice,

20:29 Music - Giorgi plays panduri and sings with Tamara - kartopili song?

Tamara Vepkhvadze 21:19 if you remember he performed Tsangala da Gogonada on the stage when Katie Melua's festival. My husband said - somebody asked me - who was that? Whose voice is that? He's half Estonian I must say. But er the sing, er yeah Estonian actually Estonia is called the singing nation which is er another subject. And er yes we er did and then it was 2017 summer, no spring time when, when Liana Jikia, again from this the first Georgian School, Supplementary School in London. The name is that. Called me and said did you know Katie Melua a singer, Georgian Singer, Georgian British singer? Of course I know. Um would you, would you teach Katies songs to children in your studio? Um or come to my school and teach children in my school. And I said, of course, I said yes, yes. And then that was another, another step where we started to learn [Katie Melua songs](#). Beautiful songs children loved it and they were very motivated because they'd heard or they had seen Katie, you know, on A YouTube or

some music they listened. And then we thought OK, that's beautiful songs but can we do the second part where we can really show our culture. And that was er, that was the idea, how was born the Summer Song Festival. I said to Liana I will teach them Georgian song - er I will teach them Katie's songs we will also sing the Georgian songs, folk songs. And of course Leanna said that's a wonderful idea. Um, so we did all the festivals, it was three years in a row, 2017, 18 and 19. It was two parts concert as you remember, I think you've been on all of them Susan, (Susan: I think so) and er, it was um one part would be Katie's repertoire and another part would be er Georgian folk songs and dances. So, that was another great experience for us and also you know motivation, and parents were more interested in - I can say that - oh you know that's a big celebrity, and a project really worked out and I'm so happy that it's even, it made the good - it was beneficial for everybody, even for Katie. I was listening to the TV programme, TV programme [Lorraine](#) is that the TV programme, British TV programme, breakfast programme Lorraine and she mentions about school and our Festival and she says that we were inspiration to bring those old songs, well known songs and she released all this new hits album because of, I mean, she nicely, beautifully talks about our children, how they, they made her er look at her songs completely from a different angle (Susan: yes) because they were, she mentions that they were singing their heart out and she was very inspired and it was, we were so happy that on the last festival, I mean, 2019 Katie er. Usually Katie would er rehearse just before concert with our children. And Susan you've been part of that hectic, crazy environment with lots of adrenaline and nerves and Katie would come just before, one hour before the concert and you could rehearse and then, that was it. In er 2019 she found the time to come to the rehearsal, and there was a time when we all, we already had a song in 3 voices - Tsangalada gogo nada, which is Kakhetian song and I remember her face sitting and just watching us mesmerized with children singing in three voices and probably it's really moved her and, and, and we taught her one Georgian song. That was a city song 'Chongurs Simebi Gavubi'. Yes and she performed with our children yes, and children were so excited they were teaching a Katie's song - and she is very good with children I must say, she is very warm and you know and she actually had some kind of questions and answer session with them - they would ask her questions and.. Then Katie approached me and said do you want me to play live music on your concert? For children, on my songs, because before that we would sing on a cover, you know recorded cover - and I was like - of course we would. So we had one trial, I think it was 15 songs of Katie's repertoire in that day, it was a very long day, she spent whole day with us and yes she played the guitar and children were singing - people sometimes don't believe that happened, like!

Susan Thompson 26:57

Oh no - that happened, I remember that happening, but I had no idea how that came about.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 27:02

She was very supportive and children had a great experience. Yes that was um a success. Every year I wanted to do something new about the Festival. I was the music director, I must say, my position was so I was totally - I could do whatever I want. I said OK let's put West and East part of Georgia and sing one song from every part of every part of Georgia. So we would start with Imereti, Imeruli Satrpialo we sung with Annanu um -

Music: 27:38 Tamara Sings - Chemi stana

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And Susan was - Maspindzeli was bass - yes. And Annanu and I was middle and top.

Susan Thompson

It's slowly coming back to me.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Do you have recordings of that?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes, actually, it is on our Facebook page

Susan Thompson

Oh - Gonieri's

Music:28:21 kesaria - live recording from summer song festival

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 28:49

so the Art Studio is in London but you are in Georgia now. (Tamara: Yes) and Is it still going, what's going on?

Tamara Vepkhvadze 28:59

When I, I think here is to mention that now I'm in Georgia right so, not to confuse people, I moved to Georgia two years ago - no one and a half year ago, for one year. But it has been the second year and er that was amazing change for us. We came here for Giorgi my son to, to absorb more Georgian language and all the culture. And luckily there was teachers who replaced me there, in my studio, before all this pandemic started. So one year Guranda, my friend, was leading a song, part of Art studio and actually Guranda was the choir leader in church, so she was teaching me church songs, there was a time, and she's wonderful with teachers, with children so it was, it was good - actually I do not think they missed me very much. (laughs) But then this pandemic happened and I don't know, I want to be positive about it, only one positive side - now I'm involved in the studio works, because I'm teaching now from here from London - online. Of course not many children join in because some cannot um sing or you know involve themselves in er online singing but the good point is that the children who wouldn't consider otherwise, or live far away from North London they joined and we are working from, yes er.

Susan Thompson

And a couple of weeks ago, before it locked down more strongly here in Georgia. I bumped into you and you said, oh yes, I'm, I'm going to a rehearsal of Amer-Imeri and then later I will teach. And I didn't really quite understand.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 30:55

Yes Amer-Imeri is ah - I don't know where to start. But I will start where was my first um er touch to Amer-Imeri, I could say. I always knew about [Edisher](#) from Tamta, from Maspindzeli, about Gigi er and I remember Amer-Imeri only once when they were fundraising for a Poland and I was so, I was like, I was supporting them, Oh I wish I can, they can go there to you to perform, and then after that when I came to Georgia of course I went to find out how is Amer-Imeri going and I met Magda and I said er my son 7 Yrs old Giorgi was at that time, wants to be to be part of Amer-Imeri and I introduce myself and Magda understand who I am, she knew Tamta. I asked nicely can I attend also the classes as a parent and because I'm a teacher too and I will learn so much from, from you and she nicely agreed yes. So I was only the parent, probably she explained later to other parents that I was kinda - not volunteer but teach, learning from them. So um that was beginning of, I would say, a new, new, how can I say ...

Susan Thompson 32:30

A new chapter?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Chapter - that's it

Susan Thompson

And probably the perfect time to stop recording just for a moment because your husband is ringing you, which means he's trying to find where we are with Giorgi.

Hello, it's Susan here with a gratitude spot. Thank you for listening today. And thanks to all our generous supporters for helping cover the costs of making this podcast. We hope our monthly Ko-fi supporters have found the extra recordings at [Ko-Fi.com/Voicesoftheancestors](https://www.ko-fi.com/Voicesoftheancestors). There's the full uninterrupted episode with Joan Mills and the extended episode with Nino Naneishvili available on Ko-fi if you sign up and buy us a coffee once a month.

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Giorgi arrives:-**Holly Taylor-Zuntz 33:48**

Hello Giorgi.

Giorgi 33:51

Hei

Holly Taylor-Zuntz 33:55

Could you introduce yourself for us.

Giorgi

I'm eight Years old.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 33:57

You are already 9 (laughter) OK, Yeah, What's your name?

Giorgi

Giorgi and I'm 9 Yrs old.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And what are you going to do for us today?

Giorgi

Play 2 or 3 songs

Tamara Vepkhvadze

On which instrument?

Giorgi

2 on Panduri 2 on Chonguri

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

So Giorgi how long have you been playing the chonguri for?

Giorgi

Not really long.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Really.

Giorgi

Yeah, I started a few months ago.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Who is your teacher?

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

No really, it doesn't sound that way - it sounds like you have been playing for years.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

His Teacher is beautiful Natia Bazarashvili, [Natia Azarashvili](#).

Music:34:33 Giorgi plays, Tamara sings, joined by Giorgi.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 35:06

Ok so I just want to say because it's a really good moment here to talk about how I see parent child relationship and all this family ensemble approaching Georgian culture and how important finding is for me that er that's where we should hold on, and er that's how we should be passed down our treasure, already from from our ancestors, and your project girls 'Voices of Ancestors' are such a good name for it. Because somehow those songs came to us through centuries and I think we are on a mission here to, to pass down to the next generation and I think here is a good moment to mention that your [latest podcast](#) with [Joan Mills](#) - I was totally mesmerized about the things she talked about, and at the end I had tears too Susan with you (laughs) and all this metaphors she used for ash and a flame was just, just, completely touching me. Because yes ash understand that's that's the past that's ancestors. But we need a flame we need the tradition innovation she mentioned we need to do - to carry on and pass down to the generations and and how beautifully she says that er Georgian songs and culture and polyphony has on this power of, of, of togetherness of how it helps to see it, for young people to communicate and to to to fill a hole and that's actually was a new thought, thank you for that interview and I hope one day I can meet Joan, because you I do some theatre well and er and they're going to be young people soon and this is powerful too for, for, you know Georgian or not Georgian or young people to use this this er heritage of georgian polyphony in the theatre experience. Yes so that's gonna be my new, my new thing to find out and think about, so thank you for that Susan. And, and I was listening also [Zoé](#) mentioning that the family ensemble - and I wanted to tell about family ensemble and that's actually that already I have few projects about that already have done. I had one song, we designed one city song and there was four generation in one song. So it was started Darajani, you know Darajani who was a grandmother then it was me 43 years old mother and it was a teenager on a guitar and he was 5-years old talented Mariami and we all perform together chemo tsitinatela. On a very serious event that was [The Hundred Years Independence Anniversary of Georgian Independence Day](#) where ambassador of that time, a Georgian ambassador, [Tamar Beruchashvili](#) she invited us to perform and it was serious event with diplomats from around the world and um we sung that song erm and I understand that there was er very important people and I've heard about [Alan Duncan](#) and I've seen him er standing next to the er ambassador some important person but I didn't know who he was. And when we performed Chemo Tsistinatela and he approached me and said can I take picture with you, with you all this.. We were wearing Georgian traditional clothes. And I said we need to sing one more song and so he said yes but I am going later so I need picture with you. And Later I found out that it was the State Minister of, er, the England and Americas United Kingdom and that photo definitely will go to the history for me because it was a great experience. And this family ensemble - then I, I brought parents to this, you know my students parents to this joining and we had this family ensemble and all this comes together because - me and Giorgi it's what we share right now. We sing lullabies right Giorgi? Before we fall asleep.

Giorgi

Mmm not really.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Not really.

Music: 39:51 Tabuni - nanei batonebo

Tamara Vepkhvadze 40:36

So um - that's um - I'll just quickly finish what I want to say that the parent child relationship is so important for a child's characteristics. Because all this ethnic, cultural and spiritual roots can be base, basement, to build, to build a relationship er with your child and be a model and be a teacher and I think that, that actually where my work, social work, and social projects um focus on. And Georgian singing it's just a beautiful tool for this and I really encourage this.

Susan Thompson 41:18

I love hearing from you Tamara but I'd really love to hear from Giorgi because you are not an adult, you are not a grown up and I have never heard from a child what singing Georgian Folk song.. How does it feel? What's it like?

Giorgi

It sounds really beautiful when you put it all together. One, one voice on its own is not the best but when it's all together it's really beautiful.

Susan Thompson

And how has it been learning with Amer-Imeri?

Giorgi

It was brilliant. They are really nice teachers and they, and they know so much stuff. And they have so much chonguris and panduris.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

It's full of instruments. When he goes to the class he just, he just watch the instruments. I think that's where he, for first time, can you buy me a panduri, so we bought panduri then we moved to chonguri and do you remember what was your first Georgian polyphonic song? In our studio - do you remember?

Giorgi

Er Dato Dato, that's Amer-Imeri.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Can I tell you the story about this song. Because when I started and I was new, new teaching polyphonic to young children. I contacted Nino Naneishvili, friend of ours, from [laloni](#), Nino and um said Nino please tell me songs that I can teach such a young audience, um, young students. And she said oh there is one beautiful song - she had the children choir at that time actually, she was teaching very young - it's [Dato's perkhuli](#) it goes, it's really nice, there is a syncretic meaning, you can it's a round dance, it's a role play and I said OK, OK. I'll find it on [Youtube](#). So

I typed into Youtube [Dato's perkhuli](#) and Amer-Imeri jumped out, that Amer-Imeri performs that on the stage. And that's what our first song was - can you see these connections! And um er then I saw how this roleplay, I don't know if you've seen this, this song how they perform it. It's about bear, right. Dato is the name, Dato is the bear. And it's bear - its' a humoristic song, so children play roles, bear is in the middle of the round dance and then they talk to the bear. They say oh bear likes this, and bear likes that - two choir song and er then bear gets married. And they - he gets married to the beautiful girl. Yeah the bear puts er you know the scarf on her, and it's all on the stage happening during the singing and they just love it and then the wife gets sick and the song says oh the song says (*xxxxxx something in georgian*) - let that wife go marry another one. And then he marries and puts the scarf on another one, and they have swords and Giorgi was very excited with the chokha performing with the sword in the wedding and when the bride and the bear go to .. so that, that's was first understanding from me how much power this, all this children folk make, and this Amer-Imeri experience and um yes Giorgi really likes Amer-Imeri. And I always tell the story about Ilia, because Ilia Garakanidze is in the same group as Giorgi. You want to say something about Ilia? So nice.

Giorgi 44:55

It's just, he's really humorous and he's really humorous about the songs.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 45:04

Children folk, that was because you know there are lots of songs but even very expertise teachers were lost when I asked - what songs should I teach my young children and um they were all - Oh, er, because and now it all makes sense because these is simple songs right. What Amer-Imeri teachers and what's, I think later on I found out what's, basement of all this Garakanidze family approach to the children folk and to the polyphony music upbringing. Susan we're trying to, to translate this paper of Edisher and it all makes sense because um it's, we don't want to use, we don't want to, we don't want them to perform perfect. You want something truly simple, which doesn't need, with simple musicality and even weak musicality of the child can be approached and they can just love. I have no students and I mean they just young and just love to sing in one voice and then whoever can sing the bass, droning bass then they do they do the bass but they still enjoy to do this and this role plays amazing and when we are in Amer-Imeri Giorgi, you would agree with me, the second part is always games. So this is Rusudan Changeli, I need to mention who is er, who brings this er games on Amer-Imeri.

Giorgi 46:33

But it's not always games she sometimes has histories.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 46:38

Yes she tells us stories, how the song was born, I mean some Georgian mythology and um and all this and Amer-Imeri - there is some kind of magic happening there. It travels time - I am travelling in time. (Susan : Yes) When I am in Amer-Imeri lessons - every single lesson I attend as a parent and um as a learning teacher I travel, I have a feeling that I am in the 17th Century policy somewhere in Guria or in, in Imereti or Samegrelo and I don't want to come out, I don't

want to come out. Even tho it is a beautiful [Blue Monastery](#) in front of us where Magda teaches Amer-Imeri and it's truly, it's the right thing to do Susan as we were going through this -how this musical upbringing and er it's not about performing children or 'stick policy' and all this because it's it just needs to be done with the love and with er, er how can I say um - family feeling.

Giorgi 47:47

Can I please say something - I remember um. She tried to bring me to another um school. But every time one somebody did a little mistake he would slam the piano and say no.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

How many times did you go there?

Giorgi

Like once. But when I was even new he would slam the key ...

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Giorgi came out and said no, I'm not gonna go to that class. Because it was too close to our home, and I said OK let's check it out. And er yes - he goes in Amer-Imeri with big joy and we miss Amer-Imeri so much. I think, because of this pandemics - the classes were interrupted but yeah, and I learn songs there and I go and teach my children in London so that song straight away travel in a time from Magda to London - next day. So basically on Tuesday Giorgi goes to Amer-Imeri and on Sunday I teach them to my children.

Susan Thompson 48:49

That's brilliant.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

On-line

Susan Thompson

And will you tell Holly the tale of the little girls travelling in the car with her parents singing away.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Oh that story, oh Lizza - Lizza is a beautiful, she is the youngest at the moment I'm teaching in my Studio on-line. On-line studio and er she loves singing and we taught her a song which we learnt from Amer-Imeri - it's (N)ardanina, Adjarian song. And then her parents posted a facebook post, and it's quite an old song. And she sits in the back seat of the car and she's singing

Music 39:32 - Tamara sings, Giorgi joins in.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 49:41

And the comments of Facebook are like - where did she get that song from, they know popular songs, like songs on the stage but they never, people had lots of questions like in the comments and I was so proud and touched. And that's our ancestors song.

Music 50:30 Giorgi plays and Tamara sings - Megrellian song - peshi baghi?

Holly Taylor-Zuntzt 50:33

What does Voices of the Ancestors mean to you?

Susan

What does Voices of the Ancestors mean to you?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Giorgi do you know who is your ancestors?

Giorgi

Mmmm

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Do you know meaning of ancestor Giorgi?

Giorgi 50:52

Half yes, half no.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

So tell me, what you know ancestor means.

Giorgi

It's an old person related to you.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes, so your grandmother, grandfather and grandmother would be your ancestors. So you that song, our ancestors were singing - right. That's, that's.

Giorgi

They are not related to us, we can say.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Who - I mean my grandmother was singing. My grandmother was a good singer apparently - er yes I am from Imereti, my Mum is from Imereti too and actually she was in the State Ensemble playing the guitar before she got married and had five children then she abandoned ... When my aunties sing - they say oh you are like your grandmother. And my other grandmother loved singing and panduri she was from mountains and ..

Giorgi

Which panduri - classic or?

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Probably traditional Giorgi, most probably. Yes, so for me er Voices of Ancestors, means exactly this travelling through time and ash and flame so I just reflect on other episodes because they all make sense what, and bridge what, what mentioned by Magda yes. So it's, these song's are building bridges, they are connecting future and the past.

Music 52:18 Giorgi plays and sings, joined by Tamara

Giorgi 53:44

And they also taught us how to come up with words.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Oh yes that's a good.. Magda taught us how to write this shairebi. You know what's called shairebi.

Giorgi

It's a joke. Joke just in songs.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

It's eight syllables on Acharian shairebi. I brought it to my studio I wrote about every member of my studio, children - a humoristic one.

Giorgi

Even me

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And they are singing about each other (laughter) this humoristic. Giorgis was

Music 53:18 Tamara sings - *Gia guna*Giorgi plays and joins in.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

So that says that he is standing on his toes, (Giorgi): Not toes) Yes toes and don't break your nose and stuff like that. And usually - Magda taught us how to er do it musically its 8 syllables da-da, da-da, da-da

Music: sings

As soon as you , you know, rhyme the last ..it works.

Susan Thompson

Yes Yes

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And children just love it because I had the idea to impromptu they had, were wearing nice dresses, frozen princess, frozen dresses, rogori dedai?

Music 54:18 - Giorgi and Tamara sing and play shairebi to Nardanina lojana da sukhia rogoris elsa da annao frozeni da....

Tamara Vepkhvadze

And they just loved it.

Susan Thompson

It sounded very cross-cultural to me as well.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

I know, I know. Because every time on a class they come with a different princess dress and I was like wow I - sometimes I try to dress interesting as well because they always are so interestingly dressed with the princess - Giorgi?

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

You know there was this one

Tamara Vepkhvadze

They live in the same house - so one is on the computer on the first floor and another cousin is on the second floor and I'm teaching them, and they are learning together and then they go and - because it is a singing family as well. And the parents and the grandmother is just so, so happy. All day long they are singing a Georgian song.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Susan do you remember when Magda told us the story about the shairebi and how Edisher taught them about this on a trip to the mountains, when things a little bit awry the night before. I think we even have a recording of Magda telling this story, we'll have to find it somewhere.

Susan Thompson

So we were in Batumi and we were on the beach with Magda's mum and with Ilia and she was remembering that when she was a child with Amer-Imeri (Tamara: Magda?) Yes. (Tamara: OK) Edisher took Amer-Imeri on a field-trip really. Into the mountains, into Adjara, and they were there and doing like you say teaching about how to learn the shierebi. (Tamara: Shieri is the single word and shierebi is the plural.) Ah OK - and I think they were actually probably giving a performance, perhaps in a village or somewhere. And um, I think she may have been quite cheeky as a young girl and because I think she came up with a rhyme in the moment about Edisher.

Magda (from personal archive recording, background sounds of walking on beach cobbles)

Magda Kevlishvili 57:33

Ah so we make this photo, no - poem for Edisher.

Susan

Ah ha,

Music 57:37 - Magda sings

??Shvili vakhmeliazeg ...panduri verandeo dghes lectia storebazeotavs ... germanias maleo??

The translation is such:-

Your son is drunk so you can't give the panduri to him because it is, you don't know, you don't know what happened. Today you gave us, you spoke with us that we have to become, become better persons. (because we did some bad things as children) So then, and - the last sentence was

"Tavsheshwale - Be healthy and go to the Germany.
That period he er.

Susan Thompson

Yes, he was in Germany sometimes.

Magda

He was studying there.

.....germanias maleo.

He thought a little, sat for maybe one minute - not more, and then said, on stage. He don't know that we have a poem for him.

Susan Thompson

Yes.

Magda

He thought a little and then,

Music 58:51 Magda sings

??Sakmegana am panduri ska mechama sakmeduris gorachamo??
gorashia ??

A very good poem and there was er. It is no matter how I can play on panduri, right side or wrong side. It is very bad thing that you don't know the elder person and the young children. And spoke with me like he am your age and I have to kill myself by the gun on the mountain in Adjara.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

That's what Edisher said?

Susan Thompson

That was his response?

Magda Kevlishvili

On the Stage. He thought a little - and said answer - and I was there! I spoke the first words of poem (Susan - and he spoke it back) the answer was to me.

Tamara Vepkhvadze 1:00:00

But today he was asking - how people can do this impromptu - I said no, I don't do impromptu, all those shierebi that I sung, it took me 15 minutes I still need to you know ...

Giorgi

Not exactly 15. - Like half an hour.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

OK but I had so many children to write about.

Susan Thompson

But I think, I think, if you are doing it regularly. I think in Amer-Imeri, if you keep practicing it becomes - a bit like people do rap - it's a similar idea I think where people practise their rhymes.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

It totally makes the experience very cheerful and playful. And especially on-line teaching you need to put the spirits up. (Susan - Yeah, yeah) Every time I try to bring something really spiritual - and bring the energy up and theyadjust their dresses because I am singing about their dresses. Now I taught them how to work - I give them homework. OK now, with your parents help, because they are very young.

Giorgi

Not everybody.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

You can write er, your shierebi and with the parents they came back with such a nice shierebi next time.

Music: 1:01:17 Giorgi and Tamara play and sing (repeating an earlier song in a better tuning)

Tamara Vepkhvadze 1:02:07

That brings me again to the teachers and to the, to the, my lucky stars. Because we were looking for a house in Kakheti for the summer you know just a holiday home. And I found this erm like home stay, called [Ketis house in Khaketi, Shilda](#). Then we arrived, I say OK we are going to stay at this home. And we, he had no idea about Panduri. He never played panduri, we

didn't have any panduri. So we call and there was, Ketis husband, probably you know Holly, if it's your, if her brother is your friend, he's er.

Giorgi

He's called Bachan.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

His name is Bachana, and he teaches children panduri and he's a very good singer of Shilda, [ensemble Shilda](#). And in one week he learned how to play panduri, we were .. it was a, active holiday. He had er. He was learning 2 hrs a day. And that song, Bachana taught us and it's a shairebi as well, actually - Kakhuri shairebi and they are quite sharp, not like Adjaran with sweet words. But in Kakheti, if you, if you, you know how they are very direct and sharp and in the words. The words are so funny. It's like you - can you imagine a boy is singing to a girl that he likes - but he doesn't say that you are beautiful or something - he says that your nose is so big that it will be good as a bridge from one bridge in Kakheti. (laughter) And then it says oh, speaks in georgian. Giorgi joins in, in Georgian singing the lyrics.

Our Georgian experience is amazing. You know how we, Chonguri as well - you know Natia said OK come and I'll teach him chonguri.

Giorgi

No, you said, she will teach you, but somehow ...

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yeah, yeah OK. I went to Natia, to learn chonguri and er.. I don't know why I took you - probably he was interested too. And I did not learn the chonguri at all, but yeah

Giorgi 1:07:58

I really, Next time I want to learn chianuri.

Tamara Vepkhvadze

Yes next is chuniri.

Giorgi

And then its changi and so on and so on...

Susan Thompson

Yeah - great, do it

Music 1:04:55 - Chamgeliani Sisters - Dala Kojas

Tamara Vepkhvadze 1:05:08

I just want to again say how lucky I feel to be part of this project and er yes and then connections sometimes it makes me feel like so emotional because yesterday when we were

talking about er songs and er when you mentioned on that podcast Susan that if not Joan Mills and this book, you wouldn't be singing. And I think, if, if, not that book maybe I won't be singing either - You know why, I can tell you how, because there would be no Maspindzeli, there would be no Tamta, I would never meet Tamta, I would never start singing myself. I mean it's just all connected and I think that's, that's the magic of um Edisher, I don't know, has all the things she, he does that connects, um, nicely all these people around the Georgian polyphony and thank you for the er, for spreading it and for letting other peoples know about it.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Well thank you Tamara and thank you Giorgi, it's been such a pleasure having you on the podcast.

Music: 1:06:17 [Katie Melua : Tu Ase Turpa Ikavi](#).

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Thank you for listening to Voices of the Ancestors with Holly Taylor-Zuntz and Susan Thompson. Our guest was Tamara Vepkhvadze and her son Giorgi. Music was by Katie Melua, Tabuni, Sakhioba, The Chamgaliani sisters, Ialoni, Anano Dadalauri, Maspindzeli and our guests. For more information, and to see a transcript of this episode, and all our episodes go to voicesoftheancestors.co.uk.

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